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curious instances of the cullibility of mankind.

A GLEANER.

To the Proprietors of the Belfast Magazine.

THE title prefixed to the first department of your Magazine, of "Correspondence, original and selected," induces me to hope, that the following remarks on cant may merit insertion in your pages. The remarks are extracted from the *Ateneum*, edited by Dr. Aikin, a periodical publication, which was probably unknown to a large portion of your readers, and which, notwithstanding its various claims as a classical and literary work, was discontinued after the publication of the 5th volume, in consequence of not receiving encouragement from the public.

E.D.

Canto quæ solitus. VIRG.

THE motto prefixed may serve as a kind of definition to the subject; for cant is, in reality, an accustomed formula of words, employed on certain occasions—the *chant* or cry adopted by parties, sects or professions, repeated from habit or imitation, without any other design in the speaker than that of saying what has been usual in similar circumstances. The beggar in the street, who addresses passengers with "Heaven bless your honour! health and prosperity to you," &c., cannot be supposed to take any real interest in the welfare of those on whom he bestows his benedictions; he only uses the cant of his trade, and does not expect that it should be taken for more than it is worth. The same is the case with other canters. They employ habitual forms of speech through a sort of *bienséance*, or regard to decorum, which the inexperienced may, in-

deed, if they please, take for earnest, but which no one conversant with the world considers as such.

Cant, therefore, is different from hypocrisy, though perhaps originating from it, and though hypocrisy generally employs a cant. In the use of cant, there is, doubtless, somewhat of an intention to appear in a favourable light to those to whom it is addressed; but this scarcely amounts to a serious purpose of deception; and in some instances, is totally free from it. Thus, when in the cant of politeness a man calls himself the devoted humble servant of another, he has no idea of being understood according to the literal sense of these words; he only wishes to be regarded as a well-bred man. Real hypocrisy seldom confines itself to cant. On the contrary, an artful hypocrite will studiously avoid that phraseology which common use has rendered unmeaning, and will perhaps seek for credit by affecting a blunt disregard of the ordinary forms of civility.

The variety of cants is as great as that of the different conditions and callings of men. Some, however, stand pre-eminent, on account of the frequency and consequence with which they are brought before the public. A brief notice of these, with their several characteristics, will form the subject of the present paper.

Political cant is one of the most noted and prominent species; and notwithstanding the daily proofs of its inanity, it still exerts no small influence over the minds of the credulous and ignorant. Each party in a state has its own appropriate cant; and states employ a cant in their transactions with each other, which is regarded as common property. The public good is a common-place equally belonging to all these cants,

though variously modified according to circumstances and situations. The monarch laments the necessity of laying additional burdens upon his dear subjects, but the public good imperiously demands such sacrifices, which, however, he hopes, will not be of long duration; in the mean time he is resolved in his own mind not to abandon any scheme of ambition or cupidity in which he is engaged, whatever his dear subjects may suffer. These patriotic sentiments are re-echoed in addresses from the people, expressive of the highest confidence in the wisdom and benevolence of the royal breast, though perhaps at the same time associations are forming for effecting a compulsory change of measures. In these cases the language on each side passes with the experienced only as words of course, and no surprise is excited on finding not the least correspondence in actions.

The cant of party delights to dwell on general terms. A very common cant of the party in power, is to express a confident hope of unanimity, although they may be conscious that they have acquired their stations by fomenting as much as possible the spirit of division. A general election is the period at which, in this country, cant is most triumphant, filling the columns of every newspaper, and the walls of every empty house. Its basis is the shibboleth of each party, combined with the personal protestations of the individual candidate. Thus, one in great letters parades his *independence*; another, his attachment to *king and constitution*; a third, his zeal for the *Protestant religion*; while all agree in proffering the most active and disinterested services to their worthy constituents. In many of these cases, the mockery of profession is so gross, that one

might suppose the writers had adopted the line of Horace,

"*Virginibus puerisque canto.*"

But the most dignified display of political cant is in the manifestoes and memorials issued from belligerent courts. The most comprehensive philanthropy, the strictest adherence to good faith and the principles of public justice, and the most laudable spirit of moderation, are assumed by all in turn, who avow no other wish than to stop the effusion of blood, and restore the blessings of peace to mankind. The late Catharine of Russia was the most conspicuous canter of her time, and was distinguished for the benevolence of her sentiments, and her frequent pious appeals to heaven for the sincerity of her declarations. It must, however, be acknowledged, that she was not the only imperial or royal proficient in this way.

A particular species of the cant of sovereigns is that of prefacing all their severe and tyrannical acts with self-applied epithets of justice and humanity. Thus, when the patriot Patkul was so cruelly sacrificed to the vengeance of Charles XII. of Sweden, an officer read the sentence in the following terms: "It is hereby made known to be the express order of his majesty, our *most merciful* sovereign, that this man, who is a traitor to his country, be broken upon the wheel and quartered, &c. "What mercy!" exclaimed the poor criminal. In like manner, those theologians who maintain that the great majority of mankind were created for the deliberate purpose of being consigned to everlasting torments, usually couple their horrid doctrine with solemn assertions of the infinite goodness of the Creator. The humane court of

Inquisition is remarkable for a cant of this kind, and it never submits a culprit to the torture without expressing the tenderest concern for his temporal and eternal welfare.

The cant of *religion* has, if possible, played a greater part on the theatre of the world than that of politics; indeed, with a large proportion of mankind, religion has always been nothing more than a cant. This may be safely predicated of all those who, while they have it continually in their mouths, are never swayed by its precepts in any action of their lives in which their worldly interest is concerned. No sect has a right to reproach another on this head: they are all

Et cāntare pares, & respondere parati.

If powerful establishments seem on one hand to have less motive for canting than their weaker rivals, as being less dependent on public opinion; on the other, the consciousness of exciting envy by their opulence and high pretensions, operates to inspire them with the cant of humility and moderation. The haughtiest priest that the world ever saw assumed the title of "the servant of the servants of God," at a time when he expected that kings and emperors should kiss his toe, and hold his stirrup. In countries where the civil authority has so far prevailed over the ecclesiastical as to enforce a political toleration of different religions, it is curious to remark how the predominant sect has accommodated a cant to its situation. "God forbid that they should think of forcing men's consciences, or denying to any of their brethren the right of private judgment." All who dissent from them are, to be sure, in the wrong, and their blindness and perversity are to be lamented; but they disclaim all methods of bringing back the stray

sheep into the fold, except those of lenity and persuasion. Meantime they do not hesitate to hold up the separatists to the hatred and reproach of their fellow-subjects, as guilty of the heinous sin of schism; and they strenuously support every unjust and impolitic restriction which ancient prejudice has imposed upon them. Such a church boasts of being *tolerant*; that is, of enduring what it cannot prevent. It may surely be affirmed, that toleration in this sense is a mere cant word.

Religious cant displays itself in nothing more than in the practice of calling in Providence on all occasions. I am sufficiently aware that a real belief of providential interferences in cases of importance, has pervaded all faiths, nor do I mean to censure the pious application of it, whatever may be my opinion of the justness of such application. But when *Te Deum* is ordered to be sung by both parties after a dubious battle, manifestly for the purpose of raising the spirits of a desponding people; or when the most trivial incidents are construed into proofs of the divine favour by an itinerant fanatic; who does not recognize the cant of hypocrisy? In the time of Cromwell, when the language of piety was that of every department in the state, we may be well assured that in many cases it was nothing more than a cant. No where did it prevail more than in the army. A commander, who from good intelligence had marched a troop of horse to surprize the enemy's quarters, in his despatches pretended to have had an answer to his prayers instigating him to the attempt. A council of war always began business by seeking the Lord for direction, while the general had in his pocket the plan of operations which he had concerted with his confidential officers. The Scotch preachers who

compelled old Leven to quit his strong post at Dunbar in the confidence of a victory promised to their prayers, were honest enthusiasts; but Cromwell, when he exclaimed at the enemy's approach, "the Lord has delivered them into our hands," well knew that he had long been employing all his artifice to bring them to this resolution.

There is also in the *religious world* a species of canting wholly distinct from all others, and which consists in a man's letting the public know from his *own confession* what a *worthless character* he is. Thus, for instance, an *Arminian* methodist, who persuades himself that he has been "born again," makes no scruple to tell the world that he is "the vilest of sinners," and that "the thoughts of his heart are evil, and that continually;" but if a bystander should take him at his word, and say "Aye, this is exactly the opinion I had formed of you in my own mind, notwithstanding your outward appearance of sanctity," it would be quickly found that this *great sinner* will shelter himself under the general corruption of human nature, and feel himself much offended at the application being made to him as an individual. This is a direct cant, through which the devotee, who loads himself with the most opprobrious epithets, expects to have the highest compliments paid to his piety and humility.

Moral cant, at least till lately, was become more fashionable in this country than religious cant; and to this head I fear must be referred much of the pure and refined sentiment with which the public are treated on various occasions. Thus, the solemn and pathetic lectures on morality which are delivered at the bar in trials for crim. con., or for other flagrant violations of the laws of virtue, can scarcely avoid this

designation, when it is known that a prior fee would have secured all the speaker's eloquence to the opposite party. I dare not affirm that the zeal manifested in the senate against corruption and public abuses is a cant; although, when we find the same orators when in place entirely forgetting their former language, and defending the very enormities against which they had so loudly declaimed, we must conclude either that some extraordinary process of conviction has suddenly taken place in their minds, or that they were merely before reciting a part in the drama of opposition. The cant of *sentimentality*, which is a kind of sickly and overstrained morality, may be mentioned under this head. Its most copious source is in plays and novels. Sterne was one of those who dealt most largely in this commodity, and brought it into fashion. He had a crowd of imitators, who, as usual, exaggerated their original, and carried the affectation of fine feeling to the borders of burlesque. On the stage the comedies termed sentimental gave the tone, which is still followed by our modern dramatists, but with the addition of caricature, and a most unnatural combination of qualities, so that nothing is now more common among the dramatic personæ, than generous sharpers, and benevolent banditti. The public kindly applauds all the cant put into the mouths of these worthies, while the authors laugh and fill their pockets.

Of other cants, that of *authorship* is not one of the least conspicuous. A versifier, who with infinite pains has strung together a parcel of rhymes, which, after every preliminary of oblique puffing, he gives to the public, affects to regard his performances as mere trifles, composed for his own private amusement, and without the most distant view to

fame. *Nos hæc novimus esse nihil.*" "His indulgent friends have been pleased to think them worthy of the light, otherwise he should have condemned them to merited obscurity. Some pieces, indeed, had already got into print without his knowledge; and his principal object is, to give in a more correct form what he could not recal."

Even Pope was not above this kind of cant. Though more a poet by profession than most of the versifying tribe, one of his favourite topics in his letters, as Dr. Johnson observes, is an affected disparagement of his own poetry. "He writes" he says, "when he has just nothing else to do." He constantly pretends the utmost insensibility to criticism, and yet composed the *Dunciad*. The same indifference is affected at the present day, by many who are in agonies on opening a review. As to the cant of pretending to write for the public good, since it has been assumed by every compiler who works by the sheet, with the aid of paste and scissars, creditable authors have scarcely ventured to use it.

Criticism itself has its cant, of which one of the most provoking instances to a poor condemned author is the affected exclamations of hardship and misery on the part of the critic, in being obliged to drudge through the wretched stuff that every month obtrudes upon the public, though without such stuff our periodical censors would not have an existence. The royal pronoun *we*, the fiction of a board of grey-beards sitting in solemn judgment round a table, and the assumed dignity of an office, frequently the self-creation of conceit and inexperience, are other examples of the cant belonging to the critical trade.

There is no species of cant so

strongly marked by a jargon of peculiar phraseology as that of connoisseurship in the fine arts. The connoisseur's vocabulary is besprinkled with a number of indefinite and metaphorical terms, which convey no precise ideas to proficients themselves, who are found widely to differ in their application of them to different performances. Their chief purpose seems to be, to furnish with a set of knowing phrases those who think themselves obliged to talk about a thing, whether they have any clear conceptions of it or not.

I shall not lengthen this paper by enumerating the several kinds of professional cant, of which the essence is a speciousness and pretence originally adopted for the purpose of deception, but continued through habit and established form, like the lawyer's wig and the clergyman's cassock. This may have its use in the common intercourse of society; yet it will always be disdained by commanding talents, and high-spirited integrity.

To the Proprietors of the Belfast Magazine.

IN reading some extracts from a "Classical tour in Italy," by the Rev. Mr. Rustace, a Catholic clergyman, my attention was forcibly arrested by the following account of an excellent regulation in a Neapolitan hospital:

"When a patient has recovered his health and strength in the hospital, and is about to return to his usual occupations, he receives from the establishment a sum of money sufficient to compensate for the loss of time and labour unavoidable during his illness; a most benevolent custom, and highly worthy of imitation. A long illness or dangerous accident deprives a poor labourer